

## MODEL POLICY #14

# CELL PHONES IN THE CLASSROOM

## Why Adopt This Policy?

School boards should consider adopting a policy to prohibit the use of cell phones in classrooms in order to help minimize distractions, improve concentration on educational tasks, and prevent cheating during exams. Eliminating cell phones from the classroom fosters more meaningful face-to-face interactions among students and creates an environment that prioritizes academic engagement and supports overall student well-being. Schools and classrooms that have implemented phone bans have seen results of higher math and reading achievement on standards tests, more knowledge gained as measured by end-of-course exams, and even other benefits such as increased play and exercise at recess.\* A 14-country study cited by UNESCO, found that the mere presence of a mobile phone nearby was enough to distract students from learning. It can take up to 20 minutes for students to refocus.†

The use of smart phones in the classroom can be a significant distraction for students. One study found that the use of cell phones to text reduced performance by as much as 30%.‡ One study found that it can take students up to 20 minutes to refocus on what they were learning after engaging in a non-academic activity. While there are mixed feelings among teachers on the use of cell phones, one study found that a plurality of teachers were opposed to their use by students in class.§ Other states have banned cell phones in school.¶ This policy provides channels for parents to maintain communication with their child during the school day, and it is not designed to override any measures in place to ensure adequate communication in the case of safety incidents or emergencies.

**Note:** This model policy contains bracketed text for school boards to select details about the scope of the policy. It is written to prohibit the use of cell phones during class time but can be expanded upon to prohibit them for the entire school day.

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\* Pawlowski, Charlotte Skau, Jonas Vestergaard Nielsen, and Tanja Schmidt. "A Ban on Smartphone Usage during Recess Increased Children's Physical Activity." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2021, article 1907. Published online 2021 Feb 16. DOI: [10.3390/ijerph18041907](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041907).

† Most, Doug. "Why Schools Should Ban Cell Phones in the Classroom." BU Today, Boston University, 8 Dec. 2023, <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2023/why-schools-should-ban-cell-phones-in-the-classroom/>

‡ Froese, Arnold D., et al. "Effects of Classroom Cell Phone Use on Expected and Actual Learning." *College Student Journal*, vol. 46, no. 2, June 2012, pp. 323-332.

§ Kevin M. Thomas, Blanche W. O'Bannon & Virginia G. Britt (2014) Standing in the Schoolhouse Door: Teacher Perceptions of Mobile Phones in the Classroom, *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 46:4, 373-395, DOI: [10.1080/15391523.2014.925686](https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2014.925686).

¶ Gecker, Jocelyn. "Kids Are Using Phones in Class, Even When It's Against the Rules. Should Schools Ban Them All Day?" *AP News*, February 27, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/school-cell-phone-ban-01fd6293a84a2e4e401708b15cb71d36>.

## Policy

**Definitions:** For purposes of this policy, “cell phone” means a portable electronic device capable of making and receiving calls, sending and receiving text messages, accessing the internet, and/or running various applications, regardless of whether or not the phone is connected to a network to provide phone service. It encompasses any handheld device that falls under this description, including smartphones and similar mobile communication devices. It does not encompass any items issued by the district such as computers or tablets. *[It does / does not include devices such as Apple watches.]*

For purposes of this policy, “instructional hours” means the designated time periods during the school day when formal teaching and learning activities take place, including classroom instruction, lectures, discussions, and educational activities supervised by teachers or staff.

For purposes of this policy, “class time” means the specific periods allocated for instructional sessions or courses throughout the school day. It represents the duration during which students are engaged in learning activities under the guidance of a teacher or instructor with a designated classroom or instructional setting. Class time is a component of the overall instructional hours.

**Scope:** This policy applies to all students during instructional hours within school premises.

*[Or: This policy applies to all students during the entire school day including instructional hours, recess, lunch, study hall, and passing time, and applies while within school premises.]*

*[Consider adding: within school premises “and during events such as field trips and other off-campus school-sponsored activities.”]*

**Prohibition:** The use of cell phones, including but not limited to making calls, sending text messages, browsing the internet, and accessing applications, is strictly prohibited within classrooms. Students will be required to stow cell phones in a designated location upon their entry into the classroom immediately before class time. Designated locations may include secure pouches such as Yondr bags, a cell phone cabinet, hanging pocket holders, or a basket.

Students are individually accountable for the safekeeping and protection of their cell phones while on school premises. The District does not assume responsibility or liability for instances of theft, loss, damage, misuse, or unauthorized use of cell phones brought onto school property by students. However, exceptions may apply in cases where negligence by school district personnel contributes to such instances.

**Exceptions:** In cases of emergencies, instructional purposes if requested by the teacher and approved by the building principal, or as authorized by an IEP team, exceptions to this policy may be granted. For purposes of this policy, “emergency” should be interpreted to mean a situation that poses an immediate threat to the safety, health, or well-being of individuals on school grounds or during school-sponsored activities, and where the use of a cell phone is necessary to seek assistance, report an emergency, or communicate urgent information to authorities or designated personnel.

**Enforcement:** Teachers and staff are responsible for enforcing this policy and may confiscate cell phones found in violation of this policy. Violations of this policy will result in disciplinary action in accordance with the school handbook

or code of conduct. Disciplinary action shall be progressive depending on number of violations and may involve one or more of the following: holding a phone to be picked up by a parent, lunch detention, in-school suspension.

If a cell phone is confiscated, it will be released and returned to the student after class time [or at the end of the school day], unless the violation involves potentially illegal activity, in which case the cell phone may be turned over to law enforcement.

School officials will not search or otherwise manipulate cell phones that are confiscated unless:

1. They reasonably suspect that the cell phone contains evidence of a violation of law or school policies;
2. There is an immediate threat to the safety and security of students, staff, or school property, such as threats or acts of violence;
3. The student voluntarily consents to the search of their cell phone, either verbally or in writing, without coercion; or
4. If there is a valid search warrant issued by a court of law authorizing search of the cell phone based on probable cause.

Parents are advised that they may maintain communication with their child during the school day through established channels provided by the school. These may include contacting the school office directly via telephone or email, where messages can be relayed to the student. School administration shall ensure that parents are promptly informed of any important updates or incidents involving their child, encouraging a collaborative approach to student safety and well-being.

**[Optional] Cell Phone Agreement:** For parents and students to know the expectations and consequences related to cell phone use at school, they will be expected to sign an agreement which includes the information contained in this policy as well as an explanation about the detrimental impact of excessive cell phone use. District administration shall provide an update to parents regarding this policy at least once per year.

For purposes of this policy, the term “parent” includes a legal guardian or other person who is legally responsible for the welfare of the child (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives). Rights under this policy transfer from the parents to a student who is 18 years old or emancipated under state law.



## Legal Analysis

If a claim of suppression of free speech is brought, so long as the school policy is reasonably related to pedagogical concerns, then the judiciary generally rules in favor of educational officials. *Hazelwood Sch. Dist. v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260, 108 S. Ct. 562, 98 L. Ed. 2d 592 (1988). If a search or seizure claim is brought, courts have found that there is a substantial interest in teachers and administrators maintaining discipline and order in the classroom. *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 469 U.S. 325, 105 S. Ct. 733, 83 L. Ed. 2d 720 (1985). Finally, teachers cannot be held liable for harm caused by any act or omission if the actions were carried out in conformity with Federal, State, and local laws in furtherance of efforts to maintain order or control in the classroom. 20 U.S.C.A § 7946.



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